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U.S. Reps. Melissa Bean, D-Barrington and Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, introduced legislation Wednesday which ensures that both active duty military and veteran personnel will have full access to the new joint medical facilities under construction at the North Chicago Veterans Administration campus.

Faced with the need to improve the Great Lakes Naval Health Clinic and the possibility of closing the North Chicago VA Medical Center, the VA and Department of Defense signed an agreement in 2005 to integrate these two facilities.

Set for completion in 2010, the new facility will be the nation's first VA/Navy Medical complex and will be named after Captain James Lovell.

"Combining these two facilities onto the VA campus and renovating the VA facility will save the taxpayers \$80 million in construction costs," Bean said. "Further, the merger will ensure that veterans in my district have a facility nearby that continues to provide care."

To complete the merger, legislative language is needed to designate the joint center as a military treatment facility. This will allow the transfer of property from a purely civilian use and will bring the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center into the TRICARE network for active duty personnel.

Without the legislation, active duty military families would be forced to pay a \$150 co-pay each time they see a doctor at the facility.